



BELFAST CITY COUNCIL PLAY POLICY



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INTRODUCTION

Play is an essential part of every child's life and vital to the processes of human development. It provides the mechanism for children to explore the world around them and the medium through which skills are developed and practised. It is essential for physical, emotional and spiritual growth, intellectual and educational development, and acquiring social and behaviour skills. Play is a generic term for a variety of activities which are satisfying to the child, creative for the child and freely chosen by the child. 'A Charter for Children's Play' National Voluntary Council for Children's Play.

Belfast City Council recognises the important value of play in meeting the developmental needs of children, young people and local communities in Belfast and is adopting this policy as a proactive approach to enhance the quality of current and future play provision.

The Policy outlines our role and responsibility in developing play opportunities. This includes information on our current services and the Council's vision to develop a high quality, innovative and inclusive play service in partnership with the community, including children and other public agencies involved in play. As part of this, we will be holding ongoing consultation to develop a strategy to enable the policy to be implemented.

An important aspect of this Policy is to build upon the partnerships Belfast City Council has already established with other agencies, interest groups, voluntary and community organisations, in working together to best meet the needs of the children of Belfast.

In meeting play needs, the Council endeavours to adopt a strategic approach that takes into consideration a combination of factors, including the targeting of social need (TSN), demographic and population characteristics, quality standards including the relevant legislative requirements, existing and planned provision, community consultation and available resources. In turn, there will be regular monitoring and evaluation of the service provided.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child supports the right of the child to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to be consulted and participate in how these services are provided. Belfast City Council supports the principles within the UN Convention and values the potential of children both through providing appropriate services and through developing mechanisms to enable children to have input into how services are developed.

Play must be considered in terms of both indoor and outdoor provision, including types of provision beyond organised activities and fixed equipment facilities. To ensure play needs of children are met, the Council along with local communities will consider the different options that are available and those that would best meet the needs of local children. For this purpose, play must be seen in its broader sense.

Belfast City Council is committed to creating a safe environment incorporating policies around child protection, health and safety and good practice. An important part of this is the creation of an environment that contributes both in the short and long terms to children's well-being and health needs. To enable this, the Council takes a holistic approach to play and the needs of children through its various services.

Children must also be seen in the wider context. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child covers all children and young people up to the age of 18 years. Although other agencies have a remit for services for young people, Belfast City Council is committed to looking at the needs of the age range as covered within the UN Convention. Although young people may not be seen as being involved in play, there is a need for them to develop their skills in a safe environment, for a place to socialise and to become integrated within their communities.

Local community groups, mainly through voluntary action play an essential part in developing playwork projects / schemes and local play areas. Their contribution is valued by Belfast City Council as having a crucial role in developing high quality play opportunities.

In line with Belfast City Council's corporate strategic objectives, play provision and services will be delivered incorporating Civic Leadership, Best Value, Sustainable Development and Good Relations. Play contributes to these objectives as services are based on participation, equal opportunity, promotion of citizenship, increasing self esteem, and instilling confidence. Play is part of an ongoing process of lifelong learning dealing with the whole child and ensuring equality of opportunity and informal education within a safe structure and setting.

In providing quality play opportunities, Belfast City Council is committed to consideration of the environmental impact of play services.

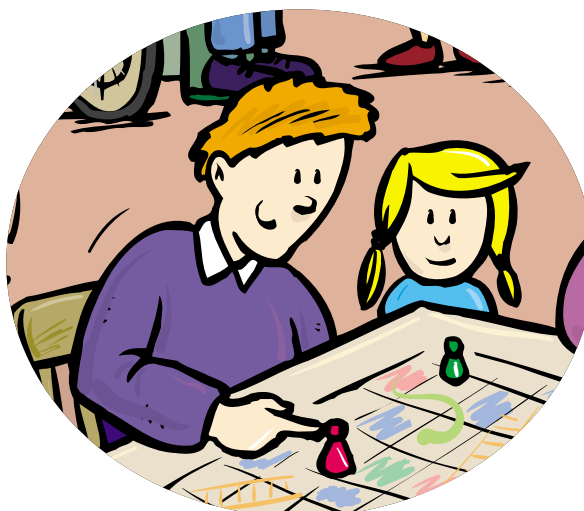


Belfast City Council is striving to become leaders in environmental management by minimising the adverse environmental impact of the services it provides. The City Council is also committed to ensuring the sustainable future of the City and will play a leading role in facilitating the development of Local Agenda 21 for the city.

Play has positive and negative impacts upon the environment. While play can have an important role in ensuring improved health and well being and provides quality learning opportunities about the environment, there must also be consideration of the potential negative impact around fixed equipment facilities in terms of the impact on the environment itself and the use of surfacing such as bark.

In line with Belfast City Council's corporate strategic objective of sustainability, the Council will have to explore other factors that impact upon play - including the increasing restrictions on children's play by cars.

This policy is an initial step and is not to be seen as a final product. During the initial consultation period, feedback was sought and received from a variety of sources including other statutory and voluntary agencies, community groups, children and the general public. (Further information on the consultation process is included in the Appendix.). A key aspect for developing the service is to include consultation in developing and implementing future policy and service delivery and to feed into monitoring and evaluation processes. As part of service delivery, Belfast City Council will be developing strategies to implement the policy and will relate to key areas within both outdoor play and playwork opportunities. Consultation will feed into this and will inform future policy.



BELFAST CITY COUNCIL'S VISION STATEMENT

The City Council is committed to working for and encouraging the continuous improvement of the City so that all citizens can see Belfast becoming better.

VISION STATEMENT FOR PLAY

Belfast City Council is committed to working towards enabling the right of every child to play, by working with local communities, public agencies and voluntary organisations to enable the play needs of children and young people to be met within prescribed boundaries and legislative requirements.



PLAY VALUES

Through a commitment to play, Belfast City Council subscribes to the following values:

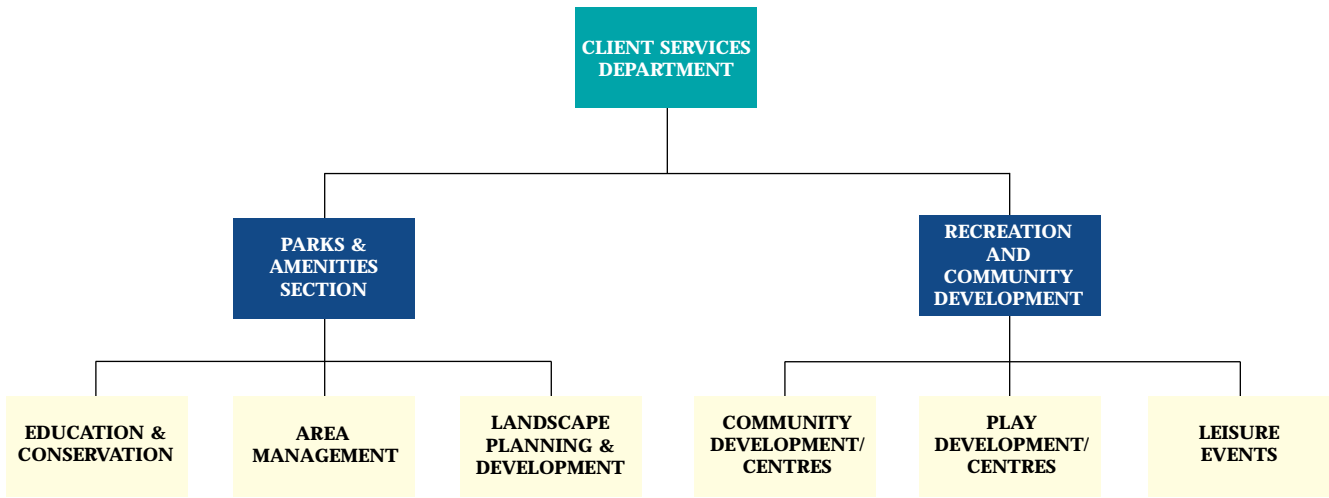
- The child must be at the centre of the process; with the child's needs, opinions and reactions, taken into account to the maximum degree consistent with health, safety and respect for the needs of others in line with the articles outlined within the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Play empowers children, affirms and supports their right to make choices, discover their own solutions and to develop at their own pace.
- There must be consistency and clarity in adult values. Children must see the connection between stated Policy and what actually happens. The child needs to feel part of a community of trust and co-operation.
- Every child has a right to a play environment that stimulates and provides opportunities for risk, challenge and growth of confidence and self-esteem.
- The individuality and diversity of every child is to be respected and valued. Prejudice against children with disabilities or who suffer social and economic disadvantage, racism, sectarianism and sexism has no place within an environment that seeks to enhance development through play. Adults involved in play should always promote the equality of opportunity and access for all children, and to seek the development of anti-discriminatory practice and positive attitudes to those who are disadvantaged.
- Play should offer the child opportunities to extend her or his exploration and understanding of the wider world and therefore physical, social and cultural settings beyond their immediate experience.
- All children have a right to a play environment free from hazard, one that ensures physical and personal safety, and a setting within which the child ultimately feels physically and personally safe.
- Play opportunities should always be provided within the current legislative framework relevant to children's rights, health, safety and well being.

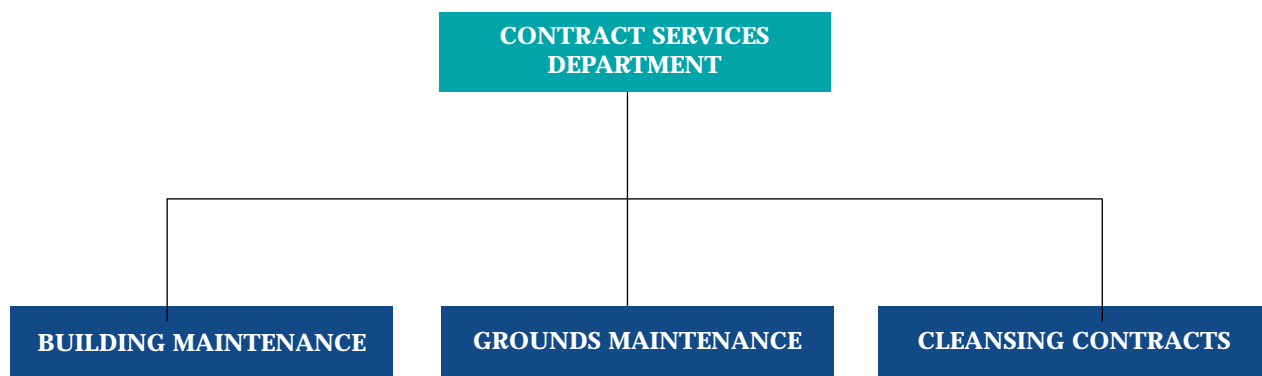


EXISTING SERVICE

Aspects of play are apparent throughout the Council and are supported through a wide range of provision from directly managed and staffed facilities to support for the voluntary sector to the provision and maintenance of outdoor play spaces and playgrounds. Information on current services will assist in developing a baseline and in developing future provision and contribute to any review of service provision.

The main remit for play both on policy and operational levels is within the Client Services Department through provision by the Parks and Amenities and Recreation and Community Development Sections as illustrated in the following diagramme.





The Contract Services Department contributes by providing an operational service that maintains and repairs premises and equipment through the Grounds and Building Maintenance Sections. The Cleansing Section has a role in providing clean streets and areas to create a safer and healthier environment for children to play.

The Town Planning Committee and Health and Environmental Services Department impact on play through their consultative role regarding planning applications and through the health and environmental control functions.

The Development Department considers issues and initiatives which impact on the quality of life in Belfast, while the Policy and Resources Committee has the overall responsibility to decide on the direction and policies of the Council and to approve the policies required to achieve the aspirations of the Council through quality services and a 'Best Value' approach.

Previously collaborative co-operation and communication within the Council between relevant Sections and Departments has been confined to specific project teams. The development of

this Play Policy as an inter and intra departmental partnership will improve the effectiveness of the service and increase accountability with the public which is compatible with the introduction of a 'Best Value' approach. The Council believes that the way forward is through active partnerships that share and co-ordinate skills and knowledge and are designed to be responsive to the needs of the people of Belfast.

The Council provides information regarding its activities to the public on a regular basis. A Corporate Plan is produced on a four yearly basis which is updated and published in May each year. Information regarding the activities of the Council is also provided through the Annual Report which is published each November. An A-Z Directory of Council Services is available which contains comprehensive information on facilities and services that the Council offers. Copies of these documents can be obtained by contacting City Hall on 028 0932 0202 or by using the text phone service on 028 9027 0405. The documents and a wide range of information regarding the various departments of the Council can also be found on the Council's website, www.belfastcity.gov.uk.



CLIENT SERVICES PROVISION

Legislative Authority

The Recreation and Youth Service Order (NI) 1986 (re-enacting the Order of 1973) gave practical responsibilities to District Councils. Article 10 (1) of the Order states:

“Each District Council shall secure the provision for its area of adequate facilities for recreational, social, physical and cultural activities and for that purpose may, either alone or together with another District Council or any other person:

- establish, maintain and manage such facilities;
- organise any such activities;
- assist by financial contributions or otherwise any person to establish, maintain and manage any such facilities or to organise any such activities;
- provide, or assist by financial contribution or otherwise in the provision of leaders for such activities; defray or contribute towards the expenses of any such persons taking part in such activities.”

PARKS & AMENITIES

The Parks and Amenities Section is responsible for ‘outdoor play’ in its own properties. ‘Outdoor play’ includes informal play in parks, playing fields etc., and formal play in specially constructed playgrounds.

The Parks and Amenities Policy is -

- until space and resources become available to provide as far as possible the full range of space recommended by NPFA. Open space for play should be provided according to the needs of the children in the community. Such space shall be flexible in use and to changing demands.
- to increase accessibility for all to play provision.
- to design playgrounds which reflect the needs of communities yet ensuring they are safe and manageable.
- to ensure that playgrounds are maintained in line with current safety standards.
- to engage in consultation to ensure that play facilities are up to date, provide adequate play value and represent ‘Best Value’.
- to organise and facilitate the organisation of a range of ‘events’ in Parks properties for children and youth.
- to create opportunities for ‘environmental’ play in informal open space.

- to provide an education service to increase young people’s enjoyment and positive use of parks and open spaces.

The Service

The Section currently manages and maintains approximately sixty-nine outdoor playgrounds, including an adventurous playground. The playgrounds are generally located within parks, adjoining play/community centres or stand alone sites. There are considerable variations between playgrounds as they differ in size, type and character, some accommodate all age groups but others are designed specifically for toddlers, juniors or seniors.

Equipment comprises the traditional swings, multiplay units to tyre swings, cross scales and aerial runways. There is one supervised playground which is located within the Belfast Castle Estate. Since its opening in 1992, it has proved to be a popular attraction and is well used by all sections of the community.

Within playgrounds and in order to attain acceptable levels of quality and adherence to safety standards, the Section has organised and implemented an extensive inspection and maintenance programme which consists of daily inspections, regular maintenance of playground equipment/surfaces and quarterly independent inspections.

Playground Bye Laws have been compiled in order to regulate their usage for the purposes intended.

The Landscape Planning and Development Unit within the Section has a remit of planning for, designing and the project management of new play area developments. New schemes are designed to meet the maximum need within the community based on a rolling programme of development as funds become available.

The Section, through its Events Officer, continues to organise summer schemes and other major events in various parks throughout the City. Activities range from organised games and sports to ‘away’ trips to various local attractions.

The Education Service provides environmental education to young people in Parks.

Staff training is provided on a continuous basis to keep updated with current safety specifications and policy issues.



RECREATION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Recreation and Community Development Section supports a range of play and playwork projects aimed at meeting the needs of children and young people.

The Recreation and Community Development Policy is -

- to significantly involve local communities in the processes and decisions that effect their lives, to create the circumstances for greater personal fulfilment and to encourage partnership between agencies and people to meet community needs.
- to facilitate local action to secure an improved quality of life within neighbourhoods.
- to assist community organisations to develop services which will complement the work of statutory agencies.
- to develop provision for the alleviation of deprivation.
- to be pro-active in targeting resources in areas of deprivation.
- to offer communities the means to respond to the play needs of children and young people.

This is achieved through:

- employment of relevant Community Development and Play staff
- provision of Community and Play Centres
- grant-aid to community and voluntary organisations
- development of seasonal playschemes and playwork.

The Service

The Section provides a wide range of play services, through directly managed centres located throughout the City, providing a valuable focus and role within local communities.

Within the service support is provided for a range of projects including:

The Council employs Community Development and Play staff to initiate good practice and provide training, support and advice

for projects, volunteers and committees. Staff also provide support to local communities in their endeavours to obtain outdoor play facilities.

Additional support is provided through the senior management team, who have responsibility for delivering a comprehensive community development strategy including community and play provision and support to the community and voluntary sector within their area.

Leisure Centres located throughout the City, provide a wide and varied programme for play, including holiday schemes and special events.

Grant Aid

A Grant Aid Programme is provided to support the community and voluntary sector, some of which are involved in developing innovative projects and seasonal playschemes aimed at meeting the needs of local children.

Developmental Role

The Recreation and Community Development Section is developing play by initiating specific policies, developing innovative projects and supporting good practice. Policy work includes the development of a Playwork Code of Practice, Pre-school and After-School Policies and a Council Child Protection Policy. This critical work is co-ordinated by the Play Development Officer, which is a senior post with a City-wide remit and responsibility to assist the strategic development and co-ordination of policy and good practice throughout Recreation and Community Development and where relevant, across the Council.

Training

To ensure high quality provision and to develop the skills of both staff and volunteers, a range of training is provided to support playwork and seasonal playschemes throughout the year. As part of this development, the Section has developed video-training packages to be used by community groups to enable greater access to training opportunities. Specialist training around issues such as equality of opportunity and the inclusion of children from minority groups or with disabilities will also be made available.

Pre-school playgroups
Crèche
Parent & Toddler groups

After school clubs
(based on open access play
development)
Seasonal playschemes
Youth Projects



DEVELOPMENT OF THE SERVICE

Interagency Co-Operation and Partnership

In developing a holistic approach to meeting children and young people's needs, Belfast City Council is committed to working with other agencies and organisations to develop and improve opportunities through inter-agency co-operation and partnership. This includes recognition that different agencies have complementary responsibilities and contributions to make in meeting the play needs of children within Belfast.

The Council is currently involved in a number of inter-agency and community forums that are involved in developing policy and strategic approaches to enhance play opportunities for children. These are important forums in which the agencies can work together and share information.

Inclusion

Belfast City Council is committed to providing equality throughout its services to ensure inclusion of all children, including those who are marginalised in any way, including disability or ethnic background. This commitment is exemplified within current Council policies.

On a practical level, the Council is involved in partnerships with other organisations and local communities to develop and fund innovative play opportunities for children and to support inclusive opportunities.

This work is currently under further development to comply with legislative requirements within both the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and the Race Relations (NI) Order 1997, which makes it unlawful for children to be discriminated against within service provision.

Quality Standards

Belfast City Council is committed to providing a high quality Play Service in compliance with recommended British and European Union standards and relevant legislative requirements reflecting core play values and principles.

Best Value for Play

Belfast City Council is committed to develop and implement processes of annual monitoring and evaluation of the service to ensure that it meets the needs of its citizens. As part of this process and to ensure that the service meets the standards of 'Best Value', an internal Council Forum will meet twice annually to look strategically at play and to contribute to service review plans.

Strategy

An essential part of the Council's Play policy will be to develop strategies as to how the policy will be implemented. Parks and Amenities and Community and Leisure as the main Sections for play will be developing in consultation with other Council Departments/Sections respective strategies to further develop and enhance provision within the City. Consultation with target groups within local communities will form an essential part of this work.

Implementation of the respective strategies will inform future service provision and the development of future policy. Clear linkages between the policy and strategy will form an essential part.

A key part of this will include consultation and inter-agency working with other agencies involved in meeting the play needs of children.



CONSULTATION PROCESS

Belfast City Council's Consultation Document was launched in December 1999, following a consultation process within the Council that included:

- Establishment of a core working group with representation from Client and Contract Services
- Meetings within Client Services
- Councillors through Parks & Amenities and Community & Leisure Services Sub-committees and Full Council Meeting

Following the launch, the consultation process involved:

Circulation of the Consultation Document

The Consultation Document was circulated to a wide range of Community Groups and Statutory and Voluntary agencies involved in providing services for children and young people in Belfast. Notices were placed in the main papers to invite people to come forward to receive copies of the Consultation Document and to submit feedback.

The Consultation Document was also placed on Belfast City Council's website.

Internal Consultation

- Chief Officers Meeting
- Community Development Fieldstaff Meeting
- Playcentre Staff Meeting
- Written Feedback received from Service Heads

External Consultation

- Consultation Seminar on 15th February 2000 in the City Hall, of which community groups, voluntary and statutory organisations were invited to receive information on the policy and to provide verbal feedback through the workshop sessions.
- Those attending included:
 - 41 representatives from Community Organisations
 - Voluntary and Statutory Organisations
 - Belfast City Council representatives

Written Feedback

Submissions were sought from those in receipt of the Consultation Document. Written feedback was received from:

- Newtonards Road Womens Group
- Upper Andersontown Community Forum
- East Belfast Community Development Agency
- NI Children's Law Centre
- Voluntary Services Belfast
- NI Volunteer Development Agency / Our Duty to Care
- ROSPA
- PlayBoard
- Castlereagh College of Further and Higher Education
- DOE Planning Service
- Enterprise Ulster

Consultation with Children

A Children's Consultation Day was organised on 29th April 2000 by Playworkers from Recreation and Community Development (formerly Community & Leisure Services) to enable children to have their say about Belfast City Council's Play and Equality Policies.

The day was the start of an ongoing consultation process that Community & Leisure Services staff will be developing to enable children and young people to have a say about Belfast City Council's policies and to enable input into Best Value processes.

The event itself involved fifty-five children from the 6 Playcentres descending upon the Folk & Transport Museum at Cultra.

The day started with a Treasure Hunt, with the children looking for clues around the houses, shops and old buildings. In the old Print Shop - they discovered a video booth where they were given the opportunity to voice their opinions on issues regarding play and equality.

The next stop included an Arts Workshop, where the children painted pictures about how & where they played.

At the end of the day - the Armagh Rhymers provided some entertainment, along with some help from the children.





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